

## An English officer's description of Wisconsin in 1837 /

Fort Howard, Wisconsin Territory. Built on west side of Fox River, at Green Bay, 1816.  
From a daguerreotype taken about 1855.

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### AN ENGLISH OFFICER'S DESCRIPTION OF WISCONSIN IN 1837. BY FREDERICK MARRYAT, C. B.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The popular writer who is known as “Captain Marryat,” wherever English books are read, visited the United States and Canada in 1837–38, and as the result of his travels wrote a work in two volumes, entitled *A Diary in America, with Remarks on its Institutions* (Philadelphia: Gary & Hart, 1839); contemporaneously, he published in London a work with a similar title, in three volumes, devoted entirely to comments on American institutions. In volume i, of the *Diary* proper, pp. 185–205, the captain gives the description of Wisconsin Territory in 1837, which is presented below. He had been traveling through Canada, and at Windsor embarked for Green Bay on the “Michigan, one of the best vessels on Lake Erie; as usual, full of emigrants, chiefly Irish.” After leaving Wisconsin, he went up the Mississippi River in a steamboat to St. Paul, then descended the Mississippi to St. Louis, with a side-trip to the lead-mines in the Galena district, and later leisurely proceeded up the Ohio by relays, in steamboats, thence returning to the cities of the Atlantic coast. Marryat had been a captain in the British navy, but resigned in 1830. At the time of his American visit he was in the full tide of his literary popularity, having published *Snarleyvow* in 1837, previous to leaving home.— Ed.

We stopped half an hour at Mackinaw to take in wood and then started for Green Bay, in the Wisconsin territory. Green Bay is a military station; it is a pretty little place, with soil as rich as garden mould. The Fox river debouches here, but the navigation is checked a few miles above the town by the rapids, which have been dammed up into a water-power;

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yet there is no doubt that as soon as the whole of the Wisconsin lands are offered for sale by the American Government, the river will be made navigable up to its meeting with the Wisconsin which falls into the Mississippi. There is only a portage of a mile and a 138 half between the two, through which a canal will be cut,<sup>1</sup> and then there will be another junction between the lakes and the Far West. It was my original intention to have taken the usual route by Chicago and Galena to St. Louis, but I fell in with Major F—with whom I had been previously acquainted, who informed me that he was about to send a detachment of troops from Green Bay to Fort Winnebago, across the Wisconsin territory. As this afforded me an opportunity of seeing the country, which seldom occurs, I availed myself of an opportunity to join the party. The detachment consisted of about one hundred recruits, nearly the whole of them Canada patriots, as they are usually called, who, having failed in taking the provinces from John Bull, were fain to accept the shilling<sup>2</sup> from Uncle Sam.

<sup>1</sup> See map, *ante*, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> An English military phrase, signifying enlistment.— Ed.

Major F—accompanied us to pay the troops at the fort, and we therefore had five waggons with us, loaded with a considerable quantity of bread and pork, and not quite so large a proportion of specie, the latter not having as yet become plentiful again in the United States. We set off, and marched fifteen miles in about half a day passing through the settlement Des Péres, which is situated at the rapids of the Fox river. Formerly they were called the Rapids des Péres, from a Jesuit college<sup>3</sup> which had been established there by the French. Our course lay along the banks of the Fox river, a beautiful swift stream pouring down between high ridges, covered with fine oak timber.

<sup>3</sup> The mission of St. Francis Xavier, established by Father Claude Allouez in 1671.— Ed.

The American Government have disposed of all the land on the banks of this river and the lake Winnebago, and consequently it is well settled; but the Winnebago territory in Wisconsin, lately purchased of the Winnebago Indians, and comprising all the prairie land

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and rich mineral country from Galena to Mineral Point is not yet offered for sale; when it is, it will be eagerly purchased; and the American Government, as it only paid the Indians at the rate of one cent and a fraction per acre, will make an enormous profit by the speculation. Well may the Indians be said, like Esau, to part with their birthright for a mess of pottage; but, in truth, they are *compelled* to sell—the purchase-money being a mere subterfuge, by which it may *appear* as if their lands were not wrested from them, although, in fact, it is.

On the second day we continued our march along the banks of the Fox river, which, as we advanced, continued to be well settled, and would have been more so, if some of the best land had not fallen, as usual, into the hands of speculators, who aware of its value, hold out that they may obtain a high price for it. The country through which we passed was undulating, consisting of a succession of ridges, covered with oaks of a large size, but not growing close as in forests; you could gallop your horse through any part of it. The tracks of deer were frequent, but we saw but one herd of fifteen, and that was at a distance. We now left the banks of the river, and cut across the country to Fond du Lee, at the bottom of Lake Winnebago, of which we had already an occasional glimpse through the openings of the forest. The deer were too wild to allow of our getting near them; so I was obliged to content myself with shooting wood pigeons, which were very plentiful.

On the night of the third day we encamped upon a very high ridge, as usual studded with oak trees. The term used here to distinguish this variety of timber land from the impervious woods, is *oak openings*. I never saw a more beautiful view than that which was afforded us from our encampment. From the high ground upon which our tents were pitched, we looked down to the left, upon a prairie flat and level as a billiard table, extending, as far as the eye could scan, one rich surface of unrivalled green. To the right, the prairie gradually changed to oak openings, and then to a thick forest, the topmost boughs and heads of which were level with our tents. Beyond them was the whole broad expanse of the Winnebago lake, 140 smooth and reflecting like a mirror the brilliant tints of the setting sun, which disappeared, leaving a portion of his glory behind him; while the moon in her ascent,

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with the dark portion of her disk as clearly defined as that which was lighted, gradually increased in brilliancy, and the stars twinkled in the clear sky. We watched the features of the landscape gradually fading from our sight, until nothing was left but broad masses partially lighted up by the young moon.

Nor was the foreground less picturesque; the spreading oaks, the tents of the soldiers, the wagons drawn up with the horses tethered, all lighted up by the blaze of our large fires. Now when I say our large fires, I mean the large fires of *America*, consisting of three or four oak trees, containing a load of wood each, besides many large boughs and branches, altogether forming a fire some twenty or thirty feet long, with flames flickering up twice as high as one's head. At a certain distance from this blazing pile you may perceive what in another situation would be considered as a large coffee-pot (before this huge fire it makes a very diminutive appearance). It is placed over some embers drawn out from the mass, which would soon have burnt up coffee-pot and coffee altogether; and at a still more respectful distance you may perceive small rods, not above four or five feet long, bifurcated at the smaller end, and fixed by the larger in the ground, so as to hang towards the huge fire, at an angle of forty degrees, like so many tiny fishing rods. These rods have at their bifurcated ends a piece of pork or ham, or of bread, or perhaps of venison, for we bought some, not having shot any; they are all private property, as each party cooks for himself. Seeing these rods at some distance, you might almost imagine that they were the fishing rods of little imps bobbing for salamanders in the fiery furnace.

In the mean time, while the meat is cooking, and the coffee is boiling, the brandy and whisky are severely taxed, as we lie upon our cloaks and buffalo skins at the front of our tents. There certainly is a charm in this wild sort of 141 life, which wins upon people the more they practice nor can it be wondered at; our wants are in reality so few and so easily satisfied, without the restraint of form and ceremony. How often, in my wanderings, have I felt the truth of Shakespeare's lines in "As You Like It."

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“Now, my co-mates and partners in exile, Hath not old custom made this life more sweet  
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods More free from peril than the envious  
court? Here feel we but the penalty of Adam— The seasons' difference.”

On the fourth day we descended, crossed the wide prairie, and arrived at the Fond du Lac, where we again fell in with the Fox river, which runs through the Winnebago lake. The roads through the forests had been very bad, and the men and horse shewed signs of fatigue; but we had now passed through all the thickly wooded country, and had entered into the prairie country, extending to Fort Winnebago, and which was beautiful beyond conception. Its features alone can be described; but its effects can only be felt by being seen. The prairies here are not very large, seldom being above six or seven miles in length or breadth; generally speaking, they lie in gentle undulating flats, and the ridges and hills between them are composed of oak openings. To form an idea of these oak openings, imagine an inland country covered with splendid trees, about as thickly planted as in our English parks; in fact, it is English park scenery, Nature having here spontaneously produced what it has been the care and labour of centuries in our own country to effect. Sometimes the prairie will rise and extend along the hills, and assume an undulating appearance, like the long swell of the ocean; it is then called rolling prairie.

Often, when I looked down upon some fifteen or twenty thousand acres of these prairies, full of rich grass, without one animal, tame or wild, to be seen, I would fancy what thousands of cattle will, in a few years, be luxuriating in those pastures, which, since the herds of buffalo 142 have retreated from them, are now useless, and throwing up each year a fresh crop, to seed and to die unheeded.

On our way we had fallen in with a young Frenchman, who had purchased some land at Fond du Lac, and was proceeding there in company with an American, whom he had hired to settle on it. I now parted company with him; he had gone out with me in my shooting excursions, and had talked of nothing but his purchase: it had water; it had waterfall; it

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had, in fact, everything that he could desire; but he thought that after two years he would go home and get a wife; a Paradise without an Eve would be no Paradise at all.

The price of labour is, as may be supposed, very high in this part of the country. Hiring by the year, you find a man in food, board, and washing, and pay him three hundred dollars per annum (about £70 English.).

The last night that we bivouacked out was the only unfortunate one. We had been all comfortably settled for the night, and fast asleep, when a sudden storm came on, accompanied with such torrents of rain as would have washed us out of our tents, if they had not been already blown down by the violence of the gale. Had we had any warning, we should have provided against it; as it was, we made up huge fires, which defied the rain; and thus we remained till daylight, the rain pouring on us, while the heat of the fires drying us almost as fast as we got wet, each man threw up a column of steam from his still saturating and still heated garments. Every night we encamped where there was a run of water, and plenty of dead timber for our fire; and thus did we go on, emptying our waggons daily of the bread and pork, and filling up the vacancies left by the removal of the empty casks with the sick and lame, until at last we arrived at Fort Winnebago.

We had not to arrive at the fort to receive a welcome, for when we were still distant about seven miles, the officers of the garrison, who had notice of our coming. made their appearance on horseback, bringing a handsome britchska and gray horses for our accommodation. Those who were 143 not on duty (and I was one) accepted the invitation, and we drove in upon a road which, indeed, lot the last thirty miles had been as level as the best in England. The carriage was followed by pointers, hounds, and a variety of dogs, who were off duty like ourselves, and who appeared quite as much delighted with their run as we were tired with ours. The medical officer attached to the fort, an old friend and correspondent of Mr. Lea of Philadelphia, received me with all kindness, and immediately installed me in one of the rooms in the hospital.

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Fort Winnebago is situated between the Fox and Wisconsin rivers at the Portage, the two rivers being about a mile and a half apart; the Fox river running east, and giving its waters to Lake Michigan at Green Bay, while the Wisconsin turns to the west, and runs into the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien. The fort is merely a square of barracks, connected together with palisades, to protect it from the Indians; and it is hardly sufficiently strong for even that purpose. It is beautifully situated, and when the country fills up will become a place of importance. Most of the officers are married, and live a very quiet, and secluded, but not unpleasant life. I stayed there two days, much pleased with the society and the kindness shewn to me; but an opportunity of descending the Wisconsin to Prairie du Chien, in a keel-boat, having presented itself, I availed myself of an invitation to join the party, instead of proceeding by land to Galena, as had been my original intention.

The boat had been towed up the Wisconsin with a cargo of flour for the garrison; and a portion of the officers having been ordered down to Prairie du Chien, they had obtained this large boat to transport themselves, families, furniture, and horses, all at once, down to their destination. The boat was about one hundred and twenty feet long, covered in to the height of six feet above the gunnel, and very much in appearance like the Noah's Ark given to children, excepting that the roof was flat. It was an unwieldy craft, and to manage it, it required at least twenty-five 144 men with poles and long sweeps; but the army gentlemen had decided that, as we were to go down with the stream, six men with short oars would be sufficient—a very great mistake. In every other respect she was badly found, as we term it at sea, having but one old piece of rope to hang on with, and one axe. Oar freight consisted of furniture stowed forward and aft, with a horse and cow. In a cabin in the centre we had a lady and five children, one maid and two officers. Our crew was composed of six soldiers, a servant and a French *halfbred* to pilot us down the river. All Winnebago came out to see us start; and as soon as the rope was cast off, away we went down with the strong current, at the rate of five miles an hour. The river passed through forests of oak, the large limbs of which hung from fifteen to twenty feet over the banks on each side; sometimes whole trees lay prostrate in the stream, held by their roots still

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partially remaining in the ground, while their trunks and branches offering resistance to the swift current, created a succession of small masses of froth, which floated away on the dark green water.

We had not proceeded far, before we found that it was impossible to manage such a large and cumbrous vessel with our few hands; we were almost at the mercy of the current, which appeared to increase in rapidity every minute; however, by exertion and good management, we contrived to keep in the middle of the stream, until the wind sprung up and drove us on to the southern bank of the river, and then all was cracking and tearing away of the woodwork, breaking of limbs from the projecting trees, snapping, cracking, screaming, hallooing and confusion. As fast as we cleared ourselves of one tree, the current bore us down upon another; as soon as we were clear above water, we were foul and entangled below. It was a very pretty general average; but what was worse than all, a snag had intercepted and unshipped our rudder, and we were floating away from it, as it still remained fixed upon the sunken tree. We had no boat with us, not even a *dugout*—(a canoe made out of the trunk of a tree,)—so one of 145 the men climbed on shore by the limbs of an oak, and went back to disengage it. He did so, but not being able to resist the force of the stream, down he and the rudder came together—his only chance of salvation being that of our catching him as he came past us. This we fortunately succeeded in effecting; and then hanging on by our old piece of rope to the banks of the river after an hour's delay, we contrived to reship our rudder, and proceeded on our voyage, which was a continuation of the same eventful history. Every half hour we found ourselves wedged in between the spreading limbs of the oaks, and were obliged to have recourse to the axe to clear ourselves; and on every occasion we lost a further portion of the frame work of our boat, either from the roof, the sides, or by the tearing away of the stanchions themselves.

A little before sunset, we were again swept on, to the bank with such force as to draw the pintles of our rudder. This finished us for the day; before it could be replaced, it was time to make fast for the night; so there we lay, holding by our rotten piece of rope, which cracked and strained to such a degree, as inclined us to speculate upon where we might find



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ourselves in the morning. However, we could not help ourselves, so we landed, made a large fire, and cooked our victuals; not, however, venturing to wander away far, on account of the rattlesnakes, which here abounded. Perhaps there is no portion of America in which the rattlesnakes are so large and so numerous as in Wisconsin. There are two varieties; the black rattlesnake, that frequents marshy spots, and renders it rather dangerous to shoot snipes and ducks; and the yellow, which takes up its abode in the rocks and dry places. Dr. F—1 told me he had killed inside of the fort Winnebago, one of the latter species, between seven and eight feet long. The rattlesnake, although its poison is so fatal, is in fact not a very dangerous animal, and people are seldom bitten by it. This arises from two causes: first, that it invariably gives you notice of its presence by its rattle; and secondly, that 10

1 Dr. Lyman Foot, see *ante*, p. 77.

146 it always coils itself up like a watch-spring before it. strikes, and then darts forward only about its own length. Where they are common, the people generally carry with them a vial of ammonia, which, if instantly applied to the bite, will at least prevent death. The copper-head is a snake. of a much more dangerous nature, from its giving no warning, and its poison being equally active.

The river has been very appropriately named by the Indians the “Stream of the Thousand Isles,” as it is studded with them; indeed, every quarter of a mile you find one or two in its channel. The scenery is fine, as the river runs through high ridges, covered with oak to their summits; sometimes these ridges are backed by higher cliffs and. mountains, which half way up are of a verdant green, and above that present horizontal strata of calcareous rock of rich gray tints, having, at a distance, very much the appearance of the dilapidated castles on the Rhine.

The scenery, though not so grand as the high lands of the Hudson, is more diversified and beautiful. The river was very full, and the current occasionally so rapid as to leave the

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foam as it swept by any projecting point. We had, now that the river widened, sand banks to contend with, which required all the exertions of our insufficient crew.

On the second morning, I was very much annoyed at our having left without providing ourselves with a boat, for at the gray of dawn, we discovered that some deer had taken the river close to us, and were in mid-stream. Had we had a boat, we might have procured a good supply of venison. We cast off again and resumed our voyage; and without any serious accident we arrived at the shot-tower, where we remained for the night. Finding a shot-tower in such a lone wilderness as this gives you some idea of the enterprise of the Americans; but the Galena, or lead district, commences here, on the south bank of the Wisconsin. The smelting is carried on about twelve miles inland, and the lead is brought here, made into shot,<sup>1</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> See Libby's "Chronicle of the Helena Shot Tower," *Wis. Hist Colls.*, xiii.— Ed.

147 then sent down the river to the Mississippi, by which, and its tributary streams, it is supplied to all America, west of the Alleghanies. The people were all at work when we arrived. The general distress had even affected the demand for shot, which was now considerably reduced.

On the third day we had the good fortune to have no wind, and consequently made rapid progress, without much further damage. We passed a small settlement called the English prairie—for the prairies were now occasionally mixed up with the mountain scenery. Here there was a smelting-house and a steam saw-mill.

The *diggings*, as they term the places where the lead is found (for they do not mine, but dig down from the surface), were about sixteen miles distant. We continued our course for about twenty miles lower down, when we wound up our day's work by getting into a more serious *fix* among the trees, and eventually losing our only *axe*, which fell overboard into deep water. All Noah's Ark was in dismay, for we did not know what might happen, or what the next day might bring forth. Fortunately, it was not requisite to cut wood for firing. During

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the whole of this trip I was much amused with our pilot, who, fully aware of the dangers of the river, was also equally conscious that there were not sufficient means on board to avoid them; when, therefore, we were set upon a sand-bank, or pressed by the wind on the sunken trees, he always whistled; that was all he could do, and in proportion as the danger became more imminent, so did he whistle the louder, until the affair was decided by a bump or a crash, and then he was silent.

On the ensuing day we had nothing but misfortunes. We were continually twisted and twirled about, sometimes with our bows, sometimes with our stern foremost, and as often with our broadside to the stream. We were whirled against one bank, and, as soon as we were clear of that we were thrown upon the other. Having no axe to cut away, we were obliged to use our hands. Again our rudder was unshipped, and with great difficulty replaced. By this time we had lost nearly the half of the upper works of the boat, one 148 portion after another having been torn off by the limbs of the trees as the impetuous current drove us along. To add to our difficulties, a strong wind rose against the current, and the boat became quite unmanageable. About noon, when we had gained only seven miles, the wind abated, and two Menonnomie Indians, in a *dug-out*, came alongside of us; and as it was doubtful whether we should arrive at the mouth of the river on that night, or be left upon a sand bank, I got into the canoe with them, to go down to the landing-place, and from thence to cross over to Prairie du Chien, to inform the officers of the garrison of our condition, and obtain assistance. The canoe would exactly hold three, and no more; but we paddled swiftly down the stream, and we soon lost sight of the Noah's Ark. Independently of the canoe being so small, she had lost a large portion of her stem, so that at the least ripple of the water she took it in, and threatened us with a swim; and she was so very narrow, that the least motion would have destroyed her equilibrium and upset her. One Indian sat in the bow, the other in the stern. whilst I was doubled up in the middle. We had given the Indians some bread and pork, and after paddling about half an hour, they stopped to eat. Now, the Indian at the bow had the pork, while the one on the stern had the bread; any attempt to move, so as to hand the eatables to each other, must

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have upset us; so this was their plan of communication:—The one in the bow cut off a slice of pork, and putting it into the lid of a saucepan which he had with him, and floating it alongside of the canoe, gave it a sufficient momentum to make it swim to the stern, when the other took possession of it. He in the stern then cut off a piece of bread, and sent it back in return by the same conveyance. I had a flask of whiskey, but they would not trust that by the same perilous little conveyance; so I had to lean forward very steadily, and hand it to the foremost, and, when he returned it to me, to lean backwards to give it the other, with whom it remained till we landed, for I could not regain it. After about an hour's more paddling, we arrived safely at the landing-place. I

Fort Crawford, Wisconsin Territory . Built at Prairie du Chien, 1826. From photograph of a contemporary painting. Wisconsin River in the foreground.

149 had some trouble to get a horse, and was obliged to go out to the fields where the men were ploughing. In doing so, I passed two or three very large snakes. At last I was mounted somehow, but without stirrups, and set off for Prairie du Chien. After riding about four miles. I had passed the mountains, and I suddenly came upon the beautiful prairie (on which were feeding several herd of cattle and horses), able with the fort in the distance, and the wide waters of the upper Mississippi flowing beyond it. I crossed the prairie, found my way into the fort, stated the situation of our party, and requested assistance. This was immediately despatched, but on their arrival at the landing-place, they found that the keel-boat had arrived at the ferry without further difficulty. Before sunset the carriages returned with the whole party, who were comfortably accommodated in the barracks—a sufficient number of men being left with the boat to bring it round to the Mississippi, a distance of about twelve miles.

Prairie du Chien is a beautiful meadow, about eight miles long by two broad, situated at the confluence of the Wisconsin and the Mississippi; it is backed with high bluffs, such as I have before described, verdant two-thirds of the way up, and crowned with rocky summits. The bluffs, as I must call them, for I know not what other name to give them, rise very abruptly, often in a sugar-loaf form, from the fiat lands, and have a very striking

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appearance: as you look up to them, their peculiar formation and vivid green sides, contrasting with their blue and gray summits, give them the appearance of a succession of ramparts investing the prairie. The fort at the prairie, which is named Fort Crawford, is, like most other American outposts, a mere enclosure, intended to repel the attacks of Indians; but is large and commodious, and the quarters of the officers are excellent; it is, moreover, built of stone, which is the case with Fort Winnebago or Fort Howard at Green Bay. The Upper Mississippi is here a beautiful clear blue stream, intersected with verdant islands, and very different in appearance from the Lower Mississippi, after it has been joined 150 by the Missouri. The opposite shore is composed of high cliffs, covered with timber, which, not only in form, but in tint and colour, remind you very much of Glover's landscapes of the mountainous parts of Scotland and Wales.

I made one or two excursions to examine the ancient mounds which are scattered all over this district, and which have excited much speculation as to their origin; some supposing them to have been fortifications, others the burial places of the Indians. That they have latterly been used by the Indians as burial places, there is no doubt; but I suspect they were not originally raised for that purpose. A Mr. Taylor has written an article in one of the periodicals,<sup>1</sup> stating his opinion that they were the burial places of chiefs; and to prove it, he asserts that some of them are thrown up in imitation of the figure of the animal which was the heraldic distinction of the chief whose remains they contain, such as the beaver, elk, &c. He has given drawings of some of them. That the Indians have their heraldic distinctions, their *totems*, as they call them, I know to be a fact; as I have seen the fur traders' books, containing the receipts of the chiefs, with their crests drawn by themselves, and very correctly too; but it required more imagination than I possess, to make out the form of any animal in the mounds. I should rather suppose the mounds to be the remains of tenements, sometimes fortified, sometimes not, which were formerly built of mud or earth, as is still the custom in the northern portion of the Sioux country. Desertion and time have crumbled them into these mounds. which are generally to be found in a commanding situation or in a string as if constructed for mutual defence. On Rock River there is a long

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line of wall, now below the surface which extends for a considerable distance, and is supposed to be the remains of a city built by a former race, probably the Mexican, who long since

1 Stephen Taylor's "Description of Ancient Remains, Ancient Mounds, and Embankments, principally in the counties of Grant, Iowa, and Richland, in Wisconsin Territory," in *American Journal of Science and Arts*, vol. xlv, pp. 21–40.

151 retreated before the northern races of Indians. I cannot recollect the name which has been given to it.<sup>1</sup> I had not time to visit this spot, but an officer showed me some pieces of what they called the brick which composes the wall. Brick it is not— no right angles have been discovered, so far as I could learn; it appears rather as if a wall had been raised of clay, and then exposed to the action of fire, as portions of it are strongly vitrified, and others are merely hard clay. But admitting my surmises to be correct, still there is evident proof that this country was formerly peopled by a nation whose habits were very different, and in all appearance more civilised than those of the races which were found here; and this is all that can be satisfactorily sustained. As, however, it is well substantiated that a race similar to the Mexican formerly existed on these prairie lands, the whole question may perhaps be solved by the following extract from Irving's *Conquest of Florida*.

"The village of Onachili resembles most of the Indian villages of Florida. The natives always endeavoured to build upon high ground, or at least to erect the house of their cacique or chief upon an eminence. As the country was very level, and high places seldom to be found, they constructed artificial mounds of earth, capable of containing from ten to twenty houses; there resided the chief, his family, and attendants. At the foot of the hill was a square, according to the size of the village, round which were the houses of the leaders and most distinguished inhabitants."

1 Reference is here made to the prehistoric remains at Aztalan.— Ed.

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I consider the Wisconsin territory as the finest portion of North America, not only from its soil, but its climate. The air is pure, and the winters, although severe, are dry and bracing; very different from, and more healthy than those of the Eastern States. At Prairie du Chien every one dwelt upon the beauty of the winter, indeed they appeared to prefer it to the other seasons. The country is, as I have described it in my route from Green Bay, alternate prairie, 152 oak openings, and forest; and the same may be said of the other side of the Mississippi, now distinguished as the district of Ioway. Limestone quarries abound, indeed, the whole of this beautiful and fertile region appears as if nature had so arranged it that man should have all difficulties cleared from before him, and have little to do but to take possession and enjoy. There is no clearing of timber requisite; on the contrary, you have just as much as you can desire, whether for use or ornament. Prairies of fine rich grass, upon which cattle fatten in three or four months, lay spread in every direction. The soil is so fertile that you have but to turn it up to make it yield grain to any extent; and the climate is healthy, at the same time that there is more than sufficient sun in the summer and autumn to bring every crop to perfection. Land carriage is hardly required, from the numerous rivers and streams which pour their waters from every direction into the Upper Mississippi. Add to all this, that the Western lands possess an inexhaustible supply of minerals, only a few feet under the surface of their rich soil—a singular and wonderful provision, as, in general, where minerals are found below, the soil above is usually arid and ungrateful. The mineral country is to the south of the Wisconsin river—at least nothing has at present been discovered north of but the northern part is still in the possession of the Winnebago indians, who are waiting for the fulfillment of the treaty before they surrender it, and at present will permit no white settler to enter it. It is said that the other portions of the Wisconsin territory will come into the market this year; at present, with the exception of the Fox river and Winnebago Lake settlements, and that of Prairie du Chien, at the confluence of the two rivers Wisconsin and Mississippi, there is hardly a log-house in the whole district. The greatest annoyance at present in this western country is the quantity and variety of snakes; it is hardly safe to land upon some parts of the Wisconsin river banks, and they certainly offer a great impediment to the excursions of the geologist

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and botanist; you are obliged to look 153 right and left as you walk, and as for putting your hand into a hole, you would be almost certain to receive a very unwished-for and unpleasant shake to welcome you.<sup>1</sup>

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Here, for the first time, I consider that I have seen the Indians in their primitive state; for till now all that I had fallen in with have been debased by intercourse with the whites, and the use of spirituous liquors. The Winnebagoes at Prairie du Chien were almost always in a state of intoxication, as were the other tribes at Mackinaw, and on the Lakes. The Winnebagoes are considered the dirtiest race of Indians, and with the worst qualities: they were formerly designated by the French, *Puans*, a term sufficiently explanatory. When I was at Prairie du Chien, a circumstance which had occurred there in the previous winter was narrated to me. In many points of manners and customs, the red men have a strong analogy with the Jewish tribes; among others an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, is most strictly adhered to. If an indian of one tribe is killed by an Indian of another, the murderer is demanded, and must either be given up, or his life must be taken by his own tribe; if not, a feud between the two nations would be the inevitable result. It appeared that a young Menonnomie, in a drunken fray, had killed a Winnebago, and the culprit was demanded by the head men of the Winnebago tribe. A council was held; and instead of the Menonnomie, the chiefs of the tribe offered them whiskey. The Winnebagoes could not resist the temptation; and it was agreed that ten gallons of whiskey should be

<sup>1</sup> Here, the author discourses upon the “squatting” customs, with especial reference to the Galena region. He goes on to say that he “remained a week at Prairie du Chien, and left my kind entertainers with regret; but an opportunity offering of going up to St. Peters [St. Paul] in a steam-boat, with General Atkinson, who was on a tour of inspection, I could not neglect so favorable a chance.” He visited Fort Shelling, and describes the Falls of St. Anthony, and then discusses the Sioux Indians thereabout. this point, we renew our extract from the *Diary*.— Ed.



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154 produced by the Menonnomies, to be drunk by all parties over the grave of the deceased. The squaws of the Menonnomie tribe had to dig the grave, as is the custom,—a task of no little labour, as the ground was frozen hard several feet below the surface.